TRAPPED IN WAR-STRICKEN EUROPE PLUCKY AMERICAN GIRL FOUGHT HER WAY

CHAPTER I.—THE WAR IS COMING

By Louise Townsend Nicholl.

"The war is coming, and no one will be gladder to see it than a Britisher," said the old guard who showed us the Tower of London. We were watching the reserve drilling, turning and returning, marching and halting, all under the weight of their great fur hats, all just skirting the little inclosure where Anne Boleyn was killed.

That was the last day before I crossed the channel for France, and if I had heeded the warning I would not have gone, would not have seen Paris in its mad war-fever, would not have missed the boat I was booked for, would not have got steerage room on the Celtic just five minutes before the tender left with its cargo of Americans and its smattering of immigrants.

But I had given up reading papers in my meteoric flight through England and Scotland, and some way the old guard's warning seemed more a bit of local color than anything else. He told us of the troops which had left for Newcastle that morning at half an hour's notice.

"Could your American soldiers do that, Miss?" he asked abruptly, looking at me with suspicion. I frankly did not know, and anyway it was time for me to be off to St. Paul's.

When we reached Rouen the next day the pension-keeper would not accept our traveling cheques; the banks would not cash them.

"La guerre," said the pension-keeper, shrugging her plump shoulders and looking at us with big eyes.

"La guerre," said the bank clerks, eyeing two American women alone in France, at this time, with a kind of pitying admiration.

But we talked with Americans at the pension, and they said: "Paris will surely be safe for a few days. Anyway, you can get your cheques cashed there. We would go if we were you."

So we, being "you" went. The station at Rouen was crowded with French soldiers and their families. Every man was the center of a little crowd of women. The children pulled at his coat or fingered his beautiful red cap as he picked them up to kiss them good-bye. We sat on our suitcases in the corridor of the train, for soldiers had first place.

At every bridge or crossing was stationed a soldier. But still it all seemed a strange rumor, a sort of play by which these excitable people, these little French soldiers in their blue and red, these young mothers holding up their littlest babies to be kissed good-bye, were filling their summer days.

The fair, sunny country of France passed us by. The sweet air from the fields sifted in through the train windows. Inside, the soldiers were cheering and jesting roughly, but outside a peaceful land rolled itself out before us, a tolerant land, generous of beauty, rich in peace. The river Seine wound cooly in and out of the yellow grain fields into which some of the English poppies had strayed. Everywhere the fields were dotted carefully—beautifully—with the slim black poplars, the very symbol, slender, and full of grace, of what I had thought France to be. The soldiers laughed among themselves inside the compartments, and we were nearing Paris.

Paris was hot, crowded, hectic, hurried, confused. The army was mobilizing. We had come from England and from old Rouen, where the glass doors of our rooms opened into an old garden, and the sweet night air had come in from where the dark yew trees and the Cathedral spire were silhouetted against the late twilight.